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General Assembly

Seventy-second session

Official Records

15th plenary meeting
Friday, 22 September 2017, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

The meeting was called to order at 9 a.m.

Address by Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Cameroon.

Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Biya *(spoke in French)*: I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I am sure that your rich experience will serve us well in successfully steering our deliberations. You can count on the full cooperation of my delegation.

My congratulations also go to Ambassador Peter Thomson, your predecessor and the architect of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on his commendable record.

Lastly, I would like, once again, to congratulate Mr. António Guterres on his unanimous election as Secretary-General of our Organization. He can count on the continuing support of Cameroon as he carries out his important and complex tasks.

This session is being held in a global context of multiple hotbeds of tension all over the world, in which terrorism continues to claim thousands of victims, human activity is causing climate disruptions and poverty is far from declining. But it is also taking place in parallel with laudable efforts aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is designed to ensure humankind's development in such a way that no one will be left behind. That explains the full relevance of this general debate under the theme "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet".

Our debates, especially our conclusions, will be a litmus test of our commitment to the ideals of the peoples of the United Nations, who, in the Preamble to the Charter, have stated their resolve to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to promote social progress and create better standards of living for all people. For Cameroon and most of our States, peace is the sine qua non for the survival of humankind and sustainable development. The peace we have continues to be dangerously threatened, notably by terrorism, conflicts, poverty and climate disruptions. Today we are all, I would say, supplicants for peace, and such persistent threats are of enormous concern to all of us.

Today, no continent or country is spared the scourge of terrorism, whose atrocities have, unfortunately, become part and parcel of our daily lives. Let me cite a few examples. In August 2017, attacks took place in Barcelona and Ouagadougou; in July 2016, a Baghdad bombing left 292 dead; in October 2015, the crash of a Russian Airbus in the Sinai left 224 dead; a March

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2015 attack on mosques in Sana'a left 142 dead; and in November 2015 attacks in Paris and Saint-Denis left 130 dead.

Maiduguri, Kolofata and Fotokol are place names that conjure up only dead, nameless and faceless bodies. The number of victims of the Boko Haram terrorist sect in the Lake Chad basin is estimated to be 2,000. Cameroon and other neighbouring countries have been dealing with that sect, which changes its methods and tactics daily, and we appreciate the support of our partners in the fight against such barbarism. The fight against Boko Haram, a jihadist sect, will need more widespread mobilization if we really want to stamp it out. It is killing our peoples, our communities, our independence and our democracy. It spells death for peace. In that regard, we look forward to the forthcoming visit to the Lake Chad region of the high-level mission led by the Secretary-General and mandated by the Security Council under resolution 2349 (2017).

We deplore the continuing conflicts in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, which are wreaking pain and hardship — so many dead, so many refugees and displaced persons, so many children wandering without a roof over their heads and facing uncertain, even shattered futures. Cameroon, which has hosted and continues to host thousands of Central African and Nigerian refugees, understands the degree to which they feel hurt, victimized and threatened in their very existence. Let us therefore mobilize, and through our policies, behaviours and actions, let us refocus on people.

Peace is under threat, not only from terrorism and conflicts, but also from persistent poverty. The Security Council has rightly reiterated that poverty is a serious threat. Why, then, do we have such difficulty tackling it accordingly? The numerous declarations and resolutions, the various United Nations development decades and the plans of action and other agendas adopted by the United Nations have not really been effective, and the result is clear. Poverty persists, and the gap between rich and poor countries is continues to widen. The situation has been aggravated by a decline in commodity prices.

Let us galvanize ourselves in a powerful surge of solidarity to roll back poverty. Let us match our words with our actions and thereby create the conditions for a decent life for our peoples. Let us therefore focus on people.

We must, for present and future generations, save our planet. We therefore welcome the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which Cameroon, I would like to point out, was among the first countries to sign and ratify. We are pleased that steps are being taken to implement it effectively. I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize the legitimate and unanimous desire of developing countries. As we all know, they pollute less and should therefore receive resources from the rich countries, which pollute more, to enable them to effectively promote the goals of the Paris Agreement at their level.

Africa has two major environmental challenges. The first is the ongoing forest degradation in Central Africa. Let us save the Congo basin, which is planet Earth's second lung. Secondly, there is desertification, which is causing Lake Chad to disappear. That vast body of water, essential to the survival of communities and biodiversity, has already lost 90 per cent of its former surface area. Let us save Lake Chad and thereby help to preserve the planet for the greater good of humankind.

The quest for peace concerns all of us. All countries must join forces to achieve peace. Is it not high time then for the voice of poor countries, especially those of Africa, to be heard? Is it not high time that Africa's message to the world was better taken into account? Is it not high time that we structured our Organization to give more weight to Africa's voice within a revitalized General Assembly and a Security Council that is more receptive and more even-handed to us? A world characterized by greater solidarity is the prerequisite for peace on Earth.

In conclusion, peace is our most precious asset. Without it, we cannot undertake sustainable and effective initiatives in the interest of our peoples, especially our young people. The theme of this debate aptly reminds us of the commitment of the founding fathers of the United Nations, that is, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and ensure a decent life for all, free from want, through cooperation. This debate urges us to renew our faith in the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Let us together take up the great challenge of world peace and development.

Once again, Cameroon, as it did from this very rostrum on 10 September 2000, urges the world to rally together in one great coalition for humankind, which

must restore to the centre of our policies. For its sake, let us secure peace and a decent life on a sustainable planet.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Cameroon for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Taneti Maamau, President, Head of Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Republic of Kiribati

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President, Head of Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Republic of Kiribati.

Mr. Taneti Maamau, President, Head of Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Republic of Kiribati, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Taneti Maamau, President, Head of Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Republic of Kiribati, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Maamau: I bring warm greetings from the Government and the people of the Republic of Kiribati, on whose behalf I am very honoured and humbled to address this gathering. In our traditional way and in the Lord's name, I share with the General Assembly blessings and peace. May all be blessed.

I join previous speakers in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. You have an important responsibility to chart and lead the course of our work during this session, and I am confident that, under your able leadership, we will achieve the goals and targets set for this session based on the theme "Focusing on people: striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet". Please be assured of our full support and cooperation.

I join others in commending and acknowledging with gratitude and pride the marvellous leadership of your predecessor and our Pacific brother, His Excellency Ambassador Peter Thomson of Fiji.

As this is our new Secretary-General's first general debate, I extend to him our heartfelt congratulations on his assumption of the leadership of our Organization, and acknowledge his unwavering commitment to reforming the United Nations in order to make it more inclusive and responsive to the contemporary global realities facing its Member States.

I congratulate you, Sir, on the theme you have chosen for this session. It serves as a reminder to us of two of the great wonders of creation: our people and our planet. They are giving rise, however, to great concern both for today and for tomorrow. People are the fundamental foundations of our families, our societies, our nations and our planet, bound together by strong human values and a strong faith in God. The theme reminds us of our important responsibility as leaders to ensure that human lives, human dignity and human values must prevail over dollar value. We must make sure we serve and deliver on our main objective as a global family to provide a peaceful and secure world without nuclear weapons and promote social progress, better living standards, human rights and dignity for all our citizens. We all want to live a happy life on a safe and sustainable planet.

As leaders of our sovereign nations we are responsible for our people, who are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Every year, we converge in this Hall from all corners of our planet to represent the voices of our people, to share their triumphs and tribulations and to share our visions for them and for our planet. The voices we represent at this gathering are constant and dominated by messages of trials and challenges with varying degrees of urgency and intensity.

In recent years we have continued to witness human suffering around the world as a result of armed conflicts, terrorism, persecution, corruption, climate change and natural disaster, to name but a few. Over the past few weeks we also have witnessed, through the media, heartbreaking news of the loss of lives and extensive devastation in the Caribbean, Mexico and the United States caused by the unprecedented and continued onslaught of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Jose and Maria, as well as an earthquake.

While they have not been as widely reported as the hurricanes and earthquakes in the Americas, the intense typhoons and monsoons in Asia have also caused great human suffering and loss. On behalf of the

people and Government of Kiribati, I offer our heartfelt condolences and prayers to all victims of those natural tragedies as they try to rebuild their lives after the loss of their loved ones and their homes.

We deal with human suffering in countries affected by rapid-onset disasters, but we must not forget the plight of those in countries such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, the Maldives and other small island developing States, who continue to suffer on a daily basis from the impact of the slow-onset climate disaster. It may not be capturing the attention of the global community, owing to its slow impact and to limited media attention, but it is causing great pain and suffering in our communities.

During this seventy-second session and in view of our theme, the United Nations should focus on the most vulnerable and underprivileged members of our global family, such as the least developed countries and small island developing States. We must provide them with special attention and support so that they can achieve self-sufficiency and enjoy decent and dignified lives. We must make sure they are not left behind in our global journey towards achieving the global development agenda. We must provide a platform on which they can participate meaningfully in international processes that affect their lives. We must make sure their voices are heard.

International processes and systems must be simplified and streamlined so as to enable enhanced participation and easy access to global resources like the Green Climate Fund. Above all else, human lives and dignity must be protected. We must celebrate and build on the diversity of our people, our rich cultures and values. We must respect each other and work together to overcome global challenges and unlock global potential.

Like others, Kiribati looks forward to a day when we will have a different story to tell to our children and our children's children — a story without heartbreaking human suffering and loss; a story of success and joy. That story must start with the major transformation of our homes, our societies, our nations and our world but, most importantly, with the immediate transformation of our hearts. That is the main source of our global problems.

My Government is embarking on an ambitious transformative 20-year vision for Kiribati towards becoming a wealthy, healthy and secure nation based on accelerated growth and strategic investment in our human, natural and cultural capital. Our priority sectors in the immediate term are fisheries and tourism, with an anticipated boost in our national income levels to help finance our development priorities. Our intervention is targeted at empowering our people at the household and community levels. They are the foundation on which our nation is based. The stronger the foundation, the more resilient and more self-sufficient our nation can be. My Government has put in place income-generation programmes to boost household income levels in order to address poverty and hardship in our society and provide an opportunity for a decent and dignified life for our people.

Our Government's policy is to serve and deliver to our people based on the principles of good governance and transparency. We have established a parliamentary select committee on anti-corruption. We have enacted a leadership code and put in place the necessary regulations and arrangements for the establishment of a leadership commission next year. Before I left Kiribati earlier this week, I launched our first-ever national anti-corruption strategy covering the public sector, the private sector and civil society. Nurturing and developing a decent life for all requires genuine and inclusive partnerships. We acknowledge existing partnerships and look forward to establishing new ones.

We cannot talk about focusing on people and creating a decent life for all if our United Nations family is incomplete or unbalanced. Every year, we pledge to consolidate and act together to provide a better life for our people, yet we choose to ignore the 23 million people in Taiwan and deprive them of the right to be part of this global family and to participate and contribute meaningfully to the sustainable development agenda. We call for a reform programme that will see Taiwan included in our global family's efforts and drive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our planet is struggling to keep up with our insatiable greed and demands. We are stretching our planet's capacity to dangerous limits. Continuing with unsustainable patterns of production and consumption will undoubtedly push our planet's life-support system to the brink of collapse. The warning signs of unprecedented natural events, bringing despair and havoc in their wake, should serve as confirmation of the poor health of our planet.

With lessons learned from the damage we have caused to our atmosphere, we must ensure that we act urgently and collectively to conserve our ocean so that we do not repeat the same mistake we made with our atmosphere. I am encouraged to note item 77 on the agenda of the General Assembly, which proposes, among other things, the formulation of an internationally legally binding instrument for the management and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

That is crucial for Kiribati and other countries that rely heavily on revenue from fisheries. A single management failure in any such fisheries area, or any other part of the ocean, could have devastating consequences, not just for the fisheries of a nearby exclusive economic zone but potentially for the fisheries of the entire ocean. Fishing revenue accounts for about 80 per cent of our current budget. I cannot emphasize enough the impact of such an issue on the ambitious vision by which, 20 years from now, Kiribati aspires to implement a self-reliance strategy to harvest, process and market its own tuna.

The ocean has a strong connection to the people and to peace and prosperity. Kiribati has played its part in the conservation and management of the ocean by declaring 11 per cent of its total exclusive economic zone as a marine protected area, a non-commercial zone and a world heritage entity under UNESCO, with the aim of enabling the re-stocking of fisheries resources for the future. We have also declared our entire exclusive economic zone a shark sanctuary. If a small, resource-constrained nation like mine is willing to make such a profound sacrifice, affecting its own economy and a resource for the entire world that its people rely on every day for a living, this global family certainly has a far greater capacity to do more and make sacrifices that focus on people, so that our children and their children can build a decent life in a sustainable environment.

In spite of all those challenges, we remain steadfast in our strong development aspirations and vision for our people. We need swift global action on climate change and we require support to mitigate and alleviate the suffering of our people. We are grateful for the support of all our development partners in our efforts to address the impact of climate change on our people in areas such as water and sanitation, coastal protection of our water resources, our critical public infrastructure and farmland.

Access to climate financing such as the Green Climate Fund takes too long to process and disburse. The longer the delay in delivering that much needed financing for urgent adaptation, the greater the cost to our people and environment. We simply cannot afford to wait any longer. As part of my Government's plan, Kiribati Vision 20, we have decided to take charge of our fate and put in place innovative financing modalities. That will enable us to fast-track financing support for our sustainable development agenda, especially in relation to climate change and disaster risk management.

With the approval of Parliament, my Government is leveraging our sovereign wealth fund as collateral for concessional debt financing. Ideally, the Government will be looking at concessional debt financing with an interest rate of 1 to 2 per cent, to be repaid when climate or adaptation financing is available. We are currently earning about a 6 per cent return on our investment. That is a move beyond traditional and conventional roles, but we would rather take the initiative to drive our own aspirations and deliver to our people, than wait for financial assistance that may come at a moment far too late. The fate of humankind and life must not be mortgaged to the bureaucratic processes of financial institutions.

In conclusion, as leaders of this global family, we have a moral responsibility to focus on the people we serve, strive for peace and a decent life for all and make sure the health of the planet is sustained so that it can continue to support life. In our quest for sustainable development, we often focus on the economic fundamentals at the expense of human values. For so long, our focus has been diverted from the very purpose of this global family to our individual fights and quest for power, dominance and greed. In the process, we fail to recognize that for some members of this global family, their priority is simply to survive and provide a decent life and future for their children.

The compassion and love that exist within all of us can easily transform our global challenges by focusing on the most vulnerable members of our global family. We contemplate how we can best find grand solutions, when all we really need is to translate the meaning of family into what it stands for — love, compassion, respect, understanding and kindness. Those are priceless solutions to the mounting problems that we continue to battle.

We come to this gathering to listen and converse, and let us do so with greater compassion, understanding, love, respect and kindness. As the saying goes, it is never too late to start. Lastly, I share with those present, all our heart, love and traditional blessing: *Te mauri, te raoi ao te tabomoa*, which means "health, peace and prosperity to us all". God bless all our people. God bless our United Nations leaders and our United Nations family and God bless our shared home, our planet.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President, Head of Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Republic of Kiribati for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Taneti Maamau, President, Head of Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Republic of Kiribati, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Touadera (*spoke in French*): I should like to add my voice to those that have preceded me at this rostrum in order to extend to you, Mr. President, my warmest congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. We wish you every success in fulfilling your noble task.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Peter Thomson, for his tremendous work and outstanding achievements during his tenure. And I commend Secretary-General António Guterres for his actions since his arrival at the head of our shared Organization.

The General Assembly is meeting for its seventy-second session at a time when our planet is facing numerous challenges, including the problem of international terrorism, that must be urgently addressed. Insecurity has taken root everywhere. Whether in the Middle East, Africa or Europe, international security is constantly under threat from terrorist groups of every stripe. That is why I am appealing solemnly to the entire international community to redouble its efforts and pool its resources in order to eradicate this scourge.

Regarding migration, North Africa is in turmoil as it sees so many victims abandoned in the desert or disappearing at sea. The route across the Mediterranean frequently ends in disaster and continues to be a major challenge that we must tackle. Moreover, the problem of refugees has worsened in recent years and is now so serious that it is a priority concern of the international community that demands special attention.

Concerning climate change and sustainable development, our planet continues to suffer the effects of natural phenomena such as earthquakes, floods, drought, rapid desertification and global warming, which are real worries. To that end, I would remind us all, as signatories to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, that we should honour the commitments made at the twenty-first Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change regarding the importance of pooling our efforts in order to preserve our shared environment.

With regard to United Nations reform, the Central African Republic, as a member of the African Union (AU), supports the common position of AU member States, as adopted by the Group of Eleven Forum in Malabo, on the need to enlarge the Security Council to include Africa.

Other global issues are the respect for human rights, the rule of law and good governance, which are indispensable prerequisites for social welfare. I pledge that the Central African Republic will continue to make its modest contribution to our joint efforts for peace, security and sustainable development, to which we all aspire.

I welcome the choice of theme for the present session, entitled "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet", an appropriate reflection of the importance of humankind's place in our Organization's agenda and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted here in 2015 with the aim of reducing poverty by half by 2030.

Today, as part of its national reconstruction policy, the Central African Republic's peacebuilding and recovery programme puts its citizens, as human beings, at the heart of its priorities. With the support of our technical and financial partners, the programme has enabled the Government to establish an appropriate institutional framework for the conduct, monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs, with particular emphasis on the objectives that have been identified as priorities.

Since this meeting of the Assembly offers me an opportunity to speak about the situation of the Central African Republic, let me say a few words about that. At the Brussels donor conference in November 2016, I mentioned the dream I share with my fellow countrymen of rebuilding a State that can come to terms with itself as a diverse and reconciled nation in a state of calm. Our plea led, as I have indicated, to an unprecedented display of international solidarity with the Central African Republic aimed at ensuring the implementation of the Central African peacebuilding and recovery programme.

In order to follow up on the plan's implementation, we have reached an agreement that will serve as a new framework for mutual commitment between the Central African Republic and the international community. It is in that spirit of continuing consultation with partners that on Tuesday, 19 September, here in New York, I presented an account of the progress we have made in implementing our commitments to attaining the Central African peacebuilding and recovery programme.

To touch on some aspects of the programme, with regard to our commitment to peace and security, the Government of the Central African Republic has combined its resources in order to consolidate the process for the cessation of all hostilities in the country. Through hard work, we have been able to secure the active and permanent participation of the 14 armed groups involved in the work of our consultative follow-up committee on disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR) in the national DDRR programme, and the committee held its seventh session on 3 and 4 August.

In our determined quest for peace, we accepted the assistance of the Community of Sant'Egidio, which led to the signing of the Political Agreement for Peace in the Central African Republic on 19 June. On that occasion all the armed groups had to reaffirm their commitment to the integrity of our national territory, to our shared values and to the constitutional principles of the Republic. Despite that significant progress, we deplore certain armed groups' violations of their commitment to an immediate cessation of hostilities throughout the country, and my Government categorically condemns the senseless violence that continues to darken the lives of innocent civilians.

In order to galvanize the peace process into reaching its full potential, strengthen the coherence of our approach and unite the support of our friends, we have worked to harmonize all the peace efforts in the Central African Republic, resulting in the adoption of a road map for peace and national reconciliation in the Central African Republic in Libreville on 17 July. We welcome that major progress, which marks the unwavering commitment of our neighbours and of the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to the success of our untiring quest for peace.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the very promising outcome of the first meeting of the facilitation panel of the African Initiative in Bangui on 11 September. Here, before the Assembly, I reaffirm my commitment to the African Initiative, as well as to ensuring its full success for the benefit of my fellow citizens, in line with the expectations we share with the friendly countries and organizations that are supporting us. At this stage, it is the sole framework uniting all efforts aimed at achieving peace and reconciliation under the determined leadership of the Central African Government.

Within the context of the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme, the work of the advisory and monitoring committee continues, and the programme has gained steam with the pilot project that I launched on 30 August. Its first phase involves 40 ex-combatants from each of 13 of the 14 armed groups. We are making every effort to ensure that the pilot programme's success becomes a monument to our true commitment to peace, because our faith in peace is unshakable.

At the same time, we are working to rebuild a national, representative, professional and republican army within a framework of security-sector reform, informed by a national security policy based on a political consensus that takes threats to security into account, and on the republican values and principles

that must guide the State in its sovereign mission to ensure security for all. In that spirit, the support offered by the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic has enabled us to form two battalions ready for deployment, and friendly and brotherly countries have made a concrete demonstration of their solidarity by training Central African components in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. In order to address the need to strengthen internal security, 500 police and gendarmes have been recruited with the help of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

In the areas of justice and human rights, our efforts have focused on operationalizing the Special Criminal Court and training prison guards, as well as on improving our judicial and penitentiary infrastructure. My Government attaches great importance to national reconciliation, but that cannot be achieved without justice, which must address the many claims of victims.

The Administration's redeployment in the prefectures is also one of our biggest and most urgent priorities, and its implementation has had support from the international community. I welcome the redeployment of civil servants in the various districts of the country, as well as the considerable resources that have already been invested in restoring public infrastructure. With the continued support of our friends and through the United Nations, the Government has initiated the Bambari pilot project, aimed at signalling the restoration of State authority. With that new momentum in redeploying the Administration throughout the territory, we are proceeding in stages so as to ensure that the approach is as inclusive as possible.

Regarding financial governance, the Government's work is yielding encouraging results, which must be pursued more vigorously, given that the country has yet to emerge fully from the acute crisis that tore it apart. Since the agreement signed with the International Monetary Fund in June 2016, several measures have been implemented to increase the State's financial performance. The strengthening of public financial management mechanisms has been reflected in the adoption of measures to rationalize parafiscal measures and increase transparency so as better to cope with revenue shortfalls. The outcome of the second review under the extended credit-facility management issued by the International Monetary Fund in July confirms that we have definitely embarked on a path of good financial governance.

Economic recovery is another area that we are giving undivided attention. The protracted crisis had a disastrous impact on production and has led to high poverty rates. The lack of economic opportunities and prospects have led some of my fellow citizens to join those resorting to violence. The reconstruction of the Central African Republic will continue to elude us as long as production continues to be unpredictable, unregimented and completely unregulated by the authorities. Among other measures, my Government is meanwhile committed to building up its DDRR programme so that all the energy that was previously channelled into negative activity can be reinvested more profitably in the service of the nation and for community recovery. In that regard, the primary sector, agriculture and livestock are central to our efforts.

The exploitation of natural resources, a sector in urgent need of attention, must be entirely controlled by the State. While we all know that the Central African Republic is overflowing with immense resources, they will continue to be empty words if we cannot harness those resources for a positive impact on the daily life of every one of my fellow citizens.

Despite all these efforts and the progress that has been made, we must not ignore the humanitarian situation, which has seriously deteriorated in several parts of the country in the wake of a resurgence of violence, whose real motive continues is still a rapacious and fierce competition for the illegal control and exploitation of the riches that lie beneath and on the surface of the soil of the Central African Republic.

Some 2.4 million people are estimated to be in need of emergency humanitarian assistance. We are dealing with 600,000 internally displaced persons who must be supported and helped so that they can return to their homes and lead productive lives. On top of that, we estimate that 500,000 of our citizens are currently refugees living primarily in neighbouring countries, and we must make every effort to repatriate them. The humanitarian crisis we are experiencing only compounds the complexity of the political situation, and we must work to remedy it.

With regard to future action, I would like to share with the Assembly our main areas of focus within the mutual engagement framework. On the issue of peace and security, I want to concentrate all our efforts on

ensuring that we will have taken significant steps in terms of dialogue with armed groups and the implementation of the national DDRR programme by the end of this year, and I am firmly committed to that.

Nevertheless, although the dialogue in this area is under way, it is a fact that the State must continue to function and especially to ensure the safety of all citizens. In order for the Forces armées centrafricaines and the interior security forces to undertake their redeployment efforts, they must be able to take action. On behalf of the people of the Central African Republic, I therefore solemnly call on the Security Council, as the political organ of the United Nations tasked with ensuring world peace, to deploy the means at its disposal, including relaxing the conditions governing the equipping of our republican defence and security forces so that they can contribute to the rapid restoration of peace and security in the Central African Republic and enable us to consolidate the democratic achievements made thus far.

With respect to political, administrative and financial governance, we are going to strengthen our dialogue with all national actors and provide political support for the implementation of the road map for peace and reconciliation in our country. Our most ardent wish is to be able to conclude that dialogue in 2017, so that the new year will have genuine prospects for peace. In that regard I call on the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to act swiftly and accelerate the deliberations of the facilitation panel. I will also commit to working in the area of justice and reconciliation. The preparations for the implementation of the transitional justice mechanism should enable us to make 2018 a year dedicated to the immense task of giving our citizens the opportunity to talk to one another in a candid way, help the truth emerge and decide to move forward towards a brighter future.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In brief, that is our situation. That is the work that we are doing constantly to achieve peace, reconciliation and the reconstruction of the Central African Republic. I am fully committed to the success of efforts to bring about peace. However, Member States are undoubtedly aware of the Central African Republic's limited capacity. Today, on top of our own weaknesses, we are worried about the fact that even MINUSCA's staff is inadequate to the challenge of protecting our civilians. The heightened security threats linked to violence from armed groups mean that more must be done to ensure that the crisis does not spread. As I plead for the easement of the equipment restrictions on our army, I now also call on the international community to increase MINUSCA's military component, given the huge territory that it has to cover. I also ask that its mandate, which will expire very soon, be reviewed and strengthened, so as to help the legitimate Government regain control of those areas that have natural resources sought after by various groups beyond Government control.

I would like to express the gratitude of the Central African people to the brotherly countries that have sent peacekeepers to my country. I pay tribute to the memory of those who have perished in carrying out their noble and dangerous mission of peace. I wish every success for our deliberations and am grateful for the opportunity to speak about my country, the Central African Republic.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Central African Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Pavel Filip, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Pavel Filip, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Mr. Pavel Filip, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Filip (Republic of Moldova) (*spoke in Romanian; English text provided by the delegation*):

At the outset, I would like to warmly congratulate Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and to wish him success in fulfilling his important mandate.

My thanks also go to his predecessor Mr. Peter Thomson, for his dedication and professionalism in conducting the work of the previous session.

I take this opportunity to express words of encouragement and support to the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres. I am confident that with his competent leadership and the joint efforts of the Member States, we will succeed in redefining the role of the United Nations and adjusting it to the requirements of the modern world.

Clearly, all of us gathered in this great Hall are deeply concerned about the challenges confronting the international community. The armed conflicts in the Middle East, protracted disputes, terrorism and violent extremism, and the affliction caused by poverty are only some of the problems undermining peace and sustainable development. We are equally concerned about the excessive accumulation of conventional weapons and the development of nuclear programmes. An international environment marked by threats to use force, including nuclear arms, greatly exacerbates people's sense of insecurity and lack of trust.

The devastating natural disasters occurring with increasing frequency in a warming world affect hundreds of millions of people, especially those living in extreme poverty. In that context, I would like to express our compassion and deep condolences to the countries and the families affected by the recent devastating hurricanes, as well as by the earthquake in Mexico.

The statements by previous speakers show that we all have similar perceptions of global problems. Today more than ever, we need the joint commitment of all States Members of the United Nations to face those challenges. In that context, I would like to reiterate my country's full support for Secretary-General Guterres's reform agenda, which puts renewed emphasis on conflict prevention, the repositioning of the development system and reform of the internal management of the United Nations in order to effectively address the world's major challenges.

Since signing the European Union Association Agreement in June 2014, my country has engaged in a complex process of structural reforms aimed at building a modern society based on the European development model. Our efforts have concentrated on steadily consolidating the rule of law and developing a functioning market economy, as well emphasizing a prominent social dimension and respect for human rights.

The strategic priorities for sectoral development include, first of all, modernizing infrastructure, managing resources efficiently, promoting a green economy and renewable energy and applying modern technologies in agriculture. We have also undertaken to reform the public administration and the public services, while ensuring gender equality and the promotion of youth. We have the political will needed to fully implement those reforms, and in that endeavour we will continue to rely on the support of our development partners, particularly the European Union and the United Nations.

The Republic of Moldova fully shares the view that the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts, in particular protracted ones, are indispensable conditions for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Considering the current lack of progress in settling protracted conflicts, there should be more direct involvement on the part of the appropriate United Nations bodies. We believe that no conflict in the world should be ignored by the United Nations, irrespective of whether it is on the Security Council's agenda or not.

We appreciate the fact that the General Assembly has agreed to include and maintain on its agenda the item entitled "Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development". Contrary to the fears of some, the General Assembly's deliberations on that item do not undermine the existing mechanisms for negotiating the settlement of conflicts in the area of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, made up of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova (GUAM). On the contrary, it is the continued monitoring of the situation in the area, together with a proactive approach by the United Nations when its involvement is needed, that can prevent or counter attempts aimed at changing the political borders of some GUAM States through methods that have nothing to do with democracy and international law.

I take this opportunity to express the Republic of Moldova's deep concern about the ongoing armed

conflict in eastern Ukraine, which endangers peace and security in our region, and to once again reiterate our full support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integritye.

Since 1992, we have repeatedly referred from this rostrum to the unresolved conflict in the eastern part of the Republic of Moldova, which is also complicated by the illegal stationing of foreign military forces on our national territory. We have underlined that, unlike other, similar conflicts in the post-Soviet space, the Transnistrian conflict, while less intricate, could be resolved more easily if all the parties concerned displayed the necessary political will. In our case, there is no ethnic or religious enmity, and the populations on both banks of the Nistru River could live in peace and mutual understanding within a reintegrated Moldovan State.

Despite our efforts over the past 25 years, including the involvement of international actors, we have not succeeded in settling this political conflict. We will continue to work to come up with a solution in the existing 5+2 settlement format. For us, it is extremely important that the solution be based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, while providing a special status for the Transnistrian region, as stipulated in the relevant documents of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

We firmly believe that the settlement process could be based on the transformation of the current trilateral peacekeeping force, which also includes a Russian contingent, into a multinational civilian mission with an international mandate. In that regard, I would like to emphasize that the trilateral disengagement force established in accordance with the Moldovan-Russian ceasefire agreement of 21 July 1992 fulfilled its remit long ago. That obsolete mechanism has become a factor in preserving the conflict and has failed to ensure the full demilitarization of the security zone and eliminate obstacles to the free movement of people, goods and services.

Contrary to our expectations, the Russian Federation has not yet withdrawn its military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, in accordance with its international commitments as stipulated in the Moldovan-Russian ceasefire agreement of July 1992, the Moldovan-Russian agreement of October 1994 and in the relevant OSCE documents, in particular the political declaration adopted at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999.

I would like to make it clear that those military forces are distinct and should not be confused with the Russian contingent that participates in the trilateral peacekeeping force, which is operating on the basis of an ad hoc arrangement. The military exercises conducted regularly in the Transnistrian region by Russian troops, with the increased participation of paramilitary forces belonging to the separatist regime in Tiraspol, pose a continuing security threat to the Republic of Moldova. The joint military drills are in flagrant violation of express obligations stipulated in the Moldovan-Russian ceasefire agreement of 1992.

According to OSCE reports, the Operative Group of Russian Troops has stockpiled more than 21,000 metric tons of weapons and ammunition. The Government of the Republic of Moldova neither controls nor supervises those weapons and munitions. Due to the complete lack of access to those foreign-controlled stockpiles — some of which may pose substantial environmental danger — the munitions' technical condition cannot be assessed and transfers of them within that territory or outside it cannot be monitored.

For the same reasons, the Republic of Moldova is unable to fulfil its international obligations as a State party under various international disarmament conventions. Although they are located on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, those weapons and munitions are not under its jurisdiction or control. Taking into account the commitments of the Russian Federation, the fundamental principles of international law and the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova regarding its permanently neutral status and its non-admission of the deployment of other States' military troops on its national territory, we firmly reiterate our request for the complete and unconditional withdrawal of the so-called Operative Group of Russian Troops, a successor to the former fourteenth Soviet army, which is illegally stationed on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. In that context, I should also invoke the declaration on 21 July by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova that calls on the Russian Federation to resume and finalize the process of withdrawing its troops and munitions from the territory of the Republic of Moldova.

Mindful that the United Nations has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and

security, the Republic of Moldova, in accordance with Article 11 of the Charter of the United Nations, requests the inclusion on the agenda of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly of a new item entitled "Withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova." In that regard, I respectfully call on all States Members of the United Nations to support that legitimate request, which is fully compliant with the principles of the Charter and represents the fundamental interests of the Republic of Moldova. We hope that the inclusion of that item on the General Assembly's agenda and its further consideration by Member States in a constructive and non-politicized manner, will constitute an important and necessary exercise in preventive diplomacy, in a country and a region where the maintenance of peace and security is persistently undermined by a lack of dialogue based on mutual respect and respect for the fundamental principles of international law.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Pavel Filip, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Charles Michel, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium.

Mr. Charles Michel, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Charles Michel, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Michel (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to express our support to the victims of the recent hurricanes as well as those of the earthquakes in Mexico. Such natural disasters brutally destroy lives and dreams and bring about instability and insecurity. Above all, however, such tragedies are akin to a warning shot. They remind us of the utter urgency of the need to work together against global warming. In that regard, I would like to welcome and support the initiative undertaken by French President Emmanuel Macron in the wake of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change aimed at establishing a genuine and far-reaching compact for the environment.

Unquestionably, we can no longer postpone what we need to do today. For many countries, in particular the island States in the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean, such natural phenomena have an immediate impact on their survival. We must bequeath our children a planet where they can live and breathe, enriched by biological diversity. Let us use the best of our intelligence and our ability to innovate in order to rise to that existential challenge.

We all want a better world. We want to fight relentlessly against all forms of injustice, inequality and discrimination, whether on the basis of skin colour, religion, gender, culture of sexual orientation. And we all want to advance universal fundamental freedoms. When we want the best for our countries and for our fellow citizens, there can be no question of the importance of the freedom of the press and of expression. All too often, elections are manipulated, justice is undermined, corruption is widespread and there is a purposeful lack of transparency. Both national and international institutions must guarantee personal freedoms and work constantly to achieve emancipation and greater dignity for all. Of course, sovereignty must be fully respected, but it cannot be used as a shield or an excuse for attempting to legitimize atrocities or force submission.

This is not a lecture on morals or about dictating, by will or force, a ready-made model democracy. This is about convincing others, through steady and constant dialogue, of the need to unreservedly defend our universal values on behalf of each and every human being, no matter where they are from or where they are going. Diplomatic ruptures have never helped to advance universal values, and abandoning dialogue is often an act of cowardice that also abandons those fighting for greater freedom in their country.

We all want a safer world. Peace, security and stability are the best ways to guarantee that we can all live our lives to the full, having enough to eat, having work, having a home and being able to send our children to school. Yet still today there are too many conflicts, wars and hatred tearing hopes and dreams apart.

No continent is spared the scourge of terrorism. Fomenting hatred and spreading the poison of division is the grim goal of terrorists, whose senseless, barbaric

acts of murder destroy families' futures. None of us can remain indifferent to that, and my country is therefore participating, with others, in the Global Coalition against Da'esh. Military forces on the ground have forced Da'esh to retreat in Iraq and Syria, and we are committed to supporting the countries that have been destroyed in their efforts to rebuild.

But we must always continue the fight to protect our universal values of freedom, tolerance, respect and non-discrimination. Our desire to live together in harmony despite our differences and with respect for each other's cultures and customs must prevail. In that regard, I would like to recall the wise and ever-pertinent words of Gandhi, who said that if we answer hatred with hatred, we only spread it.

Another threat to world security is the uncontrolled proliferation of arms, particularly nuclear weapons. While the world is in turmoil and there are numerous conflict zones, the most lasting and mutually beneficial solutions will always be political and diplomatic in nature rather than military. The agreement concluded after several years of intense negotiations with Iran on the nuclear issue must be safeguarded and implemented. My country has many major differences with Iran but the agreement is nonetheless a channel for dialogue aimed at reducing tensions and threats. It is an opportunity to agree on our goals and deal with our differences peacefully. Rejecting it without proposing any alternative seems neither wise nor desirable.

The situation in North Korea is also enlightening on this issue. In contrast to the situation with Iran, here there was no continuous process of dialogue and negotiation. The result has been a dangerous escalation that is jeopardizing peace and security. We condemn the country's autocratic and provocative regime, but merely condemning it is not enough. We should all mobilize in order to prepare the ground for dialogue, including invoking the responsibility borne by such actors as China and Russia.

Economic development must serve social cohesion. Growth rates, even in double figures, are not necessarily a guarantee of the fair and equitable distribution of wealth. Capitalism is a means, nothing more or less, for serving social and economic development. We support free trade and we want an open global economy. The free flow of goods, services and knowledge should promote shared development and progress. Sustainable development is not possible without development, and we cannot eradicate poverty without increasing prosperity. Free enterprise must be geared to the true economy, the production of good and services and job creation. We must strengthen the middle classes everywhere. This is not about the survival of the fittest or having the law of jungle imposed on us. It is about distinguishing between investment and speculation. Investment, as opposed to financial speculation, is a responsible and virtuous activity that benefits society as a whole and stimulates innovation and progress.

Throughout history, freedom of movement and free trade have brought people closer together. Those principles have been at the heart of the European project for 60 years. The European Union negotiates treaties with various partners all over the world, including Canada and Japan. Those treaties include social and environmental provisions. That openness to the world, accompanied by rules and regulations, is the most concrete response we can make to isolationism and protectionism. History has shown us, time and again, that barriers and walls between peoples are illusory — they always give way to our natural thirst for freedom, openness and innovation.

The 2030 Agenda defines an ambitious framework for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by promoting private initiative, strengthening the rule of law, encouraging education for boys and girls alike, developing agriculture and building on good governance. Those actions constitute the best recipe for preventing conflict and creating a better, fairer and stronger world.

Countries in the South as well as the North are all concerned with the issue of migration. Belgium is a land that welcomes people seeking asylum and fleeing wars and persecution. And we will fight the faithless and lawless traffickers who put women and children in makeshift boats to embark on a journey towards an all too often tragic outcome. We must be on the side of those who suffer. Development in the countries of origin is the key. We must invest in the least developed countries. We remain firmly committed to concluding a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration by 2018. We advocate for a comprehensive approach that facilitates legal migration and enables people to return to their countries of origin, while ensuring their individual security.

Multilateralism is a robust and reliable engine for building a better world. Coordination and consensus-

building are required. However, the essence of the United Nations is sometimes called into question. Globalization generates doubts and fears. Yet multilateralism does not cause such disruptions; on the contrary, it is frequently the best solution to them.

We must respect our independence, but at the same time we must also recognize our interdependence and uphold the virtues of concerted action. We must work tirelessly to build a consensus in which all nations, large and small, have their roles to play and, in that way, have a say. Belgium is fully behind the Secretary-General's vision for reforming the Organization, not because reform is an end in itself, but because the world today demands more determined and results-oriented action.

Multilateralism is a complex task, with occasional obstacles and frequent frustrations. However, there are also successes of which we speak too little. In Colombia, for example, concerted action has put an end to one of the longest conflicts in the world. Multilateralism also requires a comprehensive, inclusive and sustainable approach. Prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding must be seen as part of a continuum. International and regional consultation must also be strengthened. As we know, when regional actors and the United Nations are aligned and working together in the same direction, great things can happen.

In the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, the countries of the region have a decisive role to play. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the security situation has deteriorated considerably and the humanitarian crisis is worrying. But even as the debate on the cost of peacekeeping operations has begun, we cannot abandon the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On the contrary, we must support it so that it can anchor itself in an irreversible democratic process, including by holding honest, transparent and inclusive elections. The destinies of Africa and Europe have always been linked. Challenges to one are challenges to the other, whether we are talking about security, migration or even development. We must work to achieve a less complicated relationship, liberated from the demons of the past and functioning on a peer-to-peer level, while we look to the future.

In the Middle East, we continue to advocate for a two-State solution for Israel and Palestine. As far as Syria is concerned, that endless conflict can end only when the international community as a whole shows its political will and develops a genuine common strategy.

Combating impunity and strengthening international justice are at the heart of Belgium's priorities, and we will continue to work for them An example of such efforts is the amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We want to encourage cooperation among States in order to combat impunity for the most serious international crimes. In that regard, we call on all States that have not yet done so to support an initiative to launch the negotiation of a new treaty on mutual assistance and extradition.

Our shared goal for the United Nations must be working every day to build an efficient Organization that serves the common interests of the Member States. The key to success lies in the art of compromise and the ability listen actively — and in having the strength of conviction to bring that about. My country's transparent and constructive attitude is reaping results that benefit everyone. Belgium is a land of compromise. It is in that spirit that we are currently a candidate for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council. Based on our international roots and experience, we are ready to assume the responsibilities of building consensus and acting for peace. As the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau said, man can make his happiness only by working for that of others. We stand ready to get to work.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Charles Michel, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Mr. Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Tobgay (Bhutan): I bring warm greetings from His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo.

Today my thoughts are with the people of Mexico, who suffered two terrible earthquakes this month. My thoughts are also with the victims of the other natural disasters that have recently brought pain and misery to people around the world — the three hurricanes that battered communities in the Caribbean and the United States and the devastating floods in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka that have taken more than 1,200 lives. Please join me in observing a moment of silence to reflect on the suffering of those communities and to offer our prayers for their recovery.

The disasters I just referred to are not isolated incidents. Experts are increasingly convinced that natural disasters like hurricanes and floods are made worse by climate change. Climate change is a reality. Each of the past three years has been the hottest in recorded history, and 16 of the 17 hottest years on record have all occurred in this new century. That must alarm us, for we are only in 2017. There is no room for complacency, hesitation or finger-pointing, excuses or procrastination. The urgency is now. Our well-being is at stake. The survival of future generations is at risk. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change is proof that we have accepted that climate change is a reality, and that we are willing to come together, to work together and to fight climate change together. I urge all countries to fulfil the promises they made in Paris.

As a landlocked, mountainous country, we are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. That is why we are particularly alarmed about unchecked environmental degradation, which is the root cause of climate change. We are already experiencing flash floods, glacial lake outbursts and severe and erratic weather patterns, whose effects can be particularly devastating for a poor country.

But we will not give up. We will take action. We have ratified the Paris Agreement and are well on our way to fulfilling our pledges. A total of 72 per cent of our country is under forest cover, and more than half of it is protected as national parkland, wildlife sanctuaries or nature reserves. That means that we are the world's only carbon-neutral country. In fact, we are a carbon-negative country. In addition, we generate and export clean renewable energy and invest in green industries and organic farming practices.

After centuries of neglect, fighting climate change is complex and expensive. That is why it is critical to ensure that all countries fulfil their respective commitments. But that takes money; hence the importance of climate financing mechanisms. However, securing financing is one of the biggest challenges that smaller nations have, and the role of climate-financing institutions is therefore essential. We applaud the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) for financing more than 4,000 environmental projects in 170 countries since its establishment in the 1990s. The Green Climate Fund (GCF) has also begun to help developing countries around the world respond to climate change through innovative and transformative interventions. Those institutions are critical for those who have the will but may not have the resources to take action. I applaud the innovative strategies and interventions that they have supported.

For our part, in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund we have launched Bhutan for Life, an innovative financing mechanism that will help safeguard our rich biodiversity until our Government can assume the full cost of its protection.

Now is the time to scale up our support to the GEF and GCF. That will enable all countries to fight climate change on a war footing and help developing countries respond to its effects. I am optimistic that we will be able to prevent the worst effects of climate change. But for that we have to work together. While the threat of natural disasters will always remain, we can and must ensure that they are not directly linked to human-induced activity.

The World Bank estimates that more than 800 million people live in poverty. For them, hunger, malnourishment and deprivation are everyday realities. And that reality — the scourge of poverty — silently kills countless millions every year. I ask members to please join me in observing a moment of silence for the millions of people around the world, particularly children, who are suffering or dying from poverty and malnourishment.

Poverty has no place in this day and age. After all, this era — our era — is blessed with unprecedented wealth, knowledge and technology, giving rise to levels of prosperity the world has never seen before. Yet millions are still condemned to a life of poverty. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are critical in that regard. They give us reason for hope. While every one of the 17 Goals will contribute to eradicating the scourge of poverty, our common resolve is articulated powerfully in the very first Goal of the SDGs, which

promises nothing less than to end poverty everywhere and in all its forms.

Eradicating poverty, like dealing with climate change, is complex and expensive. But according to one estimate, it would take only $175 billion per year to end extreme poverty. That should come as good news, since it is barely 0.32 per cent of the current global gross domestic product. We no doubt have a lot of work to do, but the SDGs provide a realistic road map for this important task. However, there are no easy shortcuts.

In that connection, the Secretary-General's reform initiatives will ensure that the United Nations is fit for purpose and able to respond to the call for transformation in order to bring about shared prosperity for all peoples of the world. I thank him for initiating such bold measures, and call on all Member States to give full support to the important reforms.

We in Bhutan are blessed. Our enlightened monarchs have carefully balanced economic growth with social development, environmental sustainability and cultural preservation, all within a framework of good governance. We call this holistic approach to development Gross National Happiness, a unique philosophy that guarantees all of our citizens free education and free health care, while providing additional targeted interventions for the poor.

I am happy to report that our efforts are bearing fruit. Multidimensional poverty has already fallen by half, and we are well on our way to reducing it still further, to 5 per cent within the next few years. Our success in reducing poverty is a tribute to the leadership of our kings and the spirit of the people of Bhutan.

It is also due to the support of the United Nations and our other development partners, particularly India, Japan, the European Union, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. Their continued support, partnership and generosity have helped us reduce poverty, achieve social growth and prepare for imminent graduation from the least-developed-country category.

I now ask everyone to join me in observing a moment of silence to remember the victims of global terrorism.

Recent acts of terrorism have brought pain and suffering to countless people in nearly every part of the world, and far too many lives have been cruelly lost. The horrific acts committed by terrorist groups undermine global peace and security, and Bhutan joins the call for united action to combat those extremists. To win the fight against terrorism, we have no option but to strengthen the United Nations so that multilateralism and global cooperation are further enhanced.

Two years ago, I joined many others in calling for United Nations reform (see A/70/PV.26). The Secretary-General's reform initiatives will provide a much-needed framework for revitalizing and strengthening the United Nations. Bhutan joins all Member States in backing that bold endeavour.

But any United Nations reform would be incomplete without reforming the Security Council to reflect the changing realities of today's world. In that regard, countries like India, Japan, Brazil and Germany must be called on to serve as permanent members in the Security Council, and Africa must also be appropriately represented.

We recognize that global peace and security are a shared concern and responsibility. As a peaceful country, one that has enjoyed the benefits of United Nations membership for more than four decades, we feel it is now time for us to contribute to global peace and security, if only modestly. Accordingly, it was with a sense of pride and duty in 2014 that Bhutan joined the peacekeeping movement. Since then, we have gradually increased our peacekeeping engagement in keeping with our duty to contribute, albeit in a small way, to the cause of global peace and security. In doing so our peacekeepers have and always will uphold the highest standards of integrity, ethics and professionalism while discharging their important responsibilities. Our military and police officers today serve in 11 peacekeeping missions, and the first-ever military contingent from Bhutan is now ready to be deployed to a peacekeeping mission.

However, the bedrock of global peace and security ultimately lies within each and every one of our individual countries. Every country must therefore protect the rights of its citizens, strengthen participatory democracy and participatory Government and enable economic opportunity for all. Those are the very principles of democracy and freedom. They must be nurtured and strengthened.

Nine years ago, Bhutan embarked on the path of democracy. In an unprecedented move in human history, our King, at the height of his popularity, imposed democracy, against the will of his people. After a century of peace and prosperity under enlightened monarchs, there was much apprehension and fear. But

nine years on, it gives me great satisfaction to report that democracy in Bhutan is well entrenched and irreversible. Today all the institutions of democratic governance have been established and are functioning well, along with a growing body of civil society and a strong and vibrant media. We held successful elections in 2008 and 2013, and look forward to a third election next year, in 2018.

The importance of the United Nations has never been greater, and the imperative for multilateralism has never been stronger. As we look to the future, Bhutan will continue working with all Member States to ensure that the United Nations continues to play an instrumental role in fighting climate change, eradicating poverty and maintaining global peace and security. In that regard, I have the honour to conclude with a quotation from our beloved King, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck:

> "No nation today can stand alone in achievement. Time is slowly telling us that there can be no lasting individual success without success as a community, and there cannot be lasting national progress and success if it does not fit into a future of global peace, harmony and equality. The world must progress together or fail together."

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Lyoncheon Tshering Tobgay, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Edi Rama, Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania.

Mr. Edi Rama, Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Edi Rama, Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Rama (Albania): How many times has it happened that humankind has been confronted with as many complex challenges in such a relatively short time as is the case nowadays? Has there ever been another period in what we call modern times when we have had to deal with so many pressing issues at once? When was the last time we remember that we were all confronted with such a conflicting prospect — on the one hand, of an inspiring world that grows richer by the hour, driven by the tremendous progress of science and technology, and on the other of a planet that seems to have lost its way, its energy and its vision and to be spiralling erratically downwards?

There are no simple answers to complex questions. Yet facts are stubborn, and in many respects reality looks grim. Global terrorism and extremism continue to threaten our values and our way of life. They have become a persistent threat, with the ability to strike everywhere, indiscriminately and with far-reaching consequences, as we have sadly witnessed so many times, including in the recent past. Several brutal and seemingly intractable conflicts continue to devastate the lives of millions of people, thereby threatening the future of entire generations. Armed conflicts are nowadays more complex, the actors involved more numerous, the weapons and tactics more sophisticated and the consequences, which continue to inflict endless human suffering, more dire. The approximately 65 million people, the highest number since the Second World War, who have been forcefully and brutally uprooted from their homes constitute an indictment of our collective failure.

Climate change, a defiant truth that some still dare to question, is putting our very survival at risk. It constitutes one the most fundamental challenges for our century, as it continues to cause growing humanitarian stress. Disasters are becoming more frequent and intense, and one example, the current hurricane season in the Atlantic, reminds us that nature will always have the upper hand unless we become aware of the need to quickly adapt our way of life and protect our planet, our lives and those of our children.

The international global order has been seriously challenged without anything credible or promising to replace it. Worse, the situation in North-East Asia, a prolonged and recently exacerbated crisis sparked by the policy of a stubborn and paranoid totalitarian regime, has brought back the dreadful fear of nuclear confrontation. Inequality has continued to grow, while, in contrast, the world becomes wealthier, which casts serious doubt on the validity of promises and

guarantees of positive results for the benefit of all so often advocated for from this very rostrum.

No country, however large, rich or powerful, can face or solve such problems alone. The challenges require a unified vision and a concerted response. In an increasingly globalized world, our visions and actions should be inclusive and universal and bring people, communities and countries together. As the leader of a small nation, I hereby reiterate our pledge that we will faithfully do our part.

The increase in violent extremism and the number of non-State armed groups perpetrating atrocities, particularly against ethnic and religious minorities, continue to represent one of our most pressing challenges. The decisive action taken by the international coalition has paid off. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) has lost almost 90 per cent of the territory it once controlled, and its ability to wage war has been severely diminished. Yet let us make no mistake; its defeat on the ground does not mean that it will disappear. Our response to the extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism must continue and adapt to the nature of that persistent threat itself. Albania was among the first countries to join the Global Coalition in the fight against ISIS and international terrorism. We are now implementing a three-year action plan as an instrument for implementing our national strategy on countering violent extremism.

We welcome the increased attention that has been given to the role of regional organizations in security issues. In that respect, we greatly appreciate and welcome the close cooperation between the United Nations and the European Union (EU) on the Common Security and Defence Policy platform.

All over the world, people want to be safe and free from violence, oppression, persecution and fear. They want to be treated with dignity and know that their lives matter, regardless of gender, race, national or social origin, religious belief, political affiliation, property, birth or any other status. To achieve those goals, we need to go beyond declaratory undertakings. People rightly demand us to show responsibility and an ability to act. The pledge to leave no one behind is the central theme of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Albania is fully committed to protecting and promoting all human rights, particularly women's rights, which is another major battle for change that my Government is leading. I am proud to announce that, for the second time in a row in Albanian history, half of the members of my Government are women. They bring leadership skills, strength of character, commitment to our European values and special devotion to serving the Albanian people.

Furthermore, women count for approximately 30 per cent of the members of our Parliament and more than 45 per cent of our public administration. Those may sound like mere statistics, but they rather reflect a platform that ensures that the role of women in development and change is recognized, their rightful place in the society is secured and their voice is heard. It is my deep belief that the empowerment of women serves as a powerful driver of overall economic development and national prosperity.

One of the main national priorities for my country is to join the European Union. It is not just one of our foreign policy objectives and is not a contractual relation of sorts. For us, European integration lies at the heart of our overall development, since it touches every cell of our development architecture.

We are resolved to deliver on the fundamentals that consolidate the pillars of a democratic State, a functioning economy and a Government that works for its citizens. We want to measure our progress with results, and the very thorough justice reform we are implementing is a shining example of that.

In turn, we expect our EU partners to do their part and to clear the way towards finally opening accession talks. It will be a historic milestone, but also a strong encouragement for us to continue on the same path. We hope that the European Union, despite the current crisis, continues to believe that the enlargement process remains the best European catalyst for security, peace, development and prosperity. It has proved so in the past and remains the right bet for the future.

A couple of months ago, at the general elections, I was re-elected as Head of Government by the citizens of Albania. They have agreed with our plans for the Albania we want. Expectations are high, and so is our resolve to meet them. Our target is to ensure a sustainable economic growth of 5 per cent during my current mandate.

That brings me to one of my favourite subjects — the development of regional cooperation and the transformation of the Western Balkans into an

area of free movement for people, goods, capitals and ideas, benefiting everyone in the region. That remains one of the main pillars of our foreign policy.

There were times in the past when we would come here and spend time and energy competing with some of our neighbours on how to belittle each other, telling our one-sided stories and trying to convince the world of our specific narratives. Hopefully, that is long gone. The best proof of the profound change in the Western Balkans lies in our joint efforts, with a shared sense of responsibility and a common purpose to make the region a natural part of Europe.

Together with the European Union, and based on its principles and policies, we are working to bring down every barrier to free trade by encouraging transnational economies. A new and vibrant regional economic area, which we agreed on in July in Trieste, will boost trade and benefit our economies. I do not have the slightest doubt that it will help us to protect and promote everyone's national interests, respect the rights of minorities, strengthen good neighbourly relations and move our countries and the region as a whole towards the European Union.

Strong and healthy relations with the European Union have proved key to stability and reform progress in the Balkans. We have noticed that when the EU is overly preoccupied with itself, that bond is fragile and insecure. That is why this important relationship should be continually nurtured and strengthened, because it also facilitates regional cooperation, increased understanding and work towards reconciliation in the best European tradition and record.

As President Junker stated just a few weeks ago in his address on the state of the European Union, there is need for a credible enlargement perspective so that the Western Balkans can attain more stability in the EU. Revitalizing the enlargement policy will be the best deterrent to the disintegration narrative that is fuelled by populist ideas. It is my firm belief that as much as we need the European Union, the European Union needs a stronger, more developed and coherent Western Balkans.

We are well aware of that. And practice has shown that in order to build a fully functioning region, all of its members must be treated the same way. That is why we think that the admission of Kosovo to every regional body, with the same rights as other countries, is of paramount significance. Many have used the Assembly over the past years to express worries and fear that Kosovo's independence would unleash dark forces that no one would be able to control. We have seen nothing of the sort. Instead, what has really happened it that Albanians in Kosovo and Albania, as well as Serbs, once threatened with extermination by a brutal regime, are now free citizens living in democratic countries and contributing to further developing an open society.

Who can deny the impressive achievements made by Kosovo in less than a decade of independence? They include the consolidation of its democratic institutions, good governance, exemplary multi-ethnic and interreligious coexistence and evident progress in the Euro-Atlantic integration process. Every credible report on the current situation in the Western Balkans would undoubtedly lead to the same conclusion — today the Western Balkans is far better off than it was three or five years ago, let alone 10. Kosovo's independence has not unleashed any dark forces. On the contrary, it has brought stability to the entire region.

For several years, Serbia and Kosovo have been engaged in serious dialogue on the normalization of their relations, with the mediation and facilitation of the European Union. After centuries of mistrust, a climate of trust and regional cooperation for both countries is a growing reality. That serves as an even greater reason to remind those countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo to consider doing so as soon as possible. That should not be seen as defiance or a loss, as it is often wrongly portrayed. We have said it before and we will say it again: recognizing Kosovo, establishing relations and helping Kosovo move forward, which is something that 114 Member States have done so far, constitute a direct contribution to bettering the lives of Kosovo's citizens and investing in the security and stability of the whole region and all of its countries, including Serbia.

Let me conclude by highlighting the need for the United Nations to change in order to remain relevant, live up to its responsibilities, secure the promise of sustainable development, ensure human rights and guarantee peace and security for future generations. We are aware that such reform is about what we can and must do together in order to better support our common efforts in transforming lives. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development points the way towards a better future, the future we want and the future that our children deserve. We cannot and must not fail to deliver on that promise. Albania stands ready to do its part and

cooperate with all those willing to invest in the future and make our world a better place for all.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Edi Rama, Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta.

Mr. Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Muscat (Malta): There can be no peace while poverty, especially extreme poverty, exists. Peace is not just about the absence of war or conflict. Rather, is is about managing and addressing climate change, migration and food and water insecurity. The instrument of the United Nations that weaves sustainable peace together with universal challenges is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In that regard, Malta, as President of the Council of the European Union, has worked hard with its other member States to achieve a successful march towards a new European consensus on development that encompasses the 2030 Agenda through a resolute plan of action to eradicate poverty.

Never has it been more urgent to work to preserve the future of humankind. The 2030 Agenda is the first step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Every sector of society must be on board if we are to deliver on such an arduous task. As the Commonwealth's Chair-in-Office, I would like to highlight its strong commitment to its role in realizing the SDGs. The Commonwealth represents 52 different realities, which has led us to launch, in broad terms, a number of common initiatives to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Malta is taking action at the national level. We have made a voluntary commitment to designating 30 per cent of all waters under Maltese jurisdiction as marine protected areas. As is well known, Malta has been at the forefront of international maritime and marine-related issues. Fifty years ago, Malta's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations, the late Arvid Pardo, made a famous speech that triggered the negotiation of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (see A/C.1/PV.1515). It is in a similar spirit that we support the valuable work being done to achieve a legally binding international instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, which will be crucial to finally bringing legal protection to the biodiversity of the high seas. For our part, we will continue contributing to the good governance of the oceans by hosting the next Ocean Conference in Malta in October. Furthermore, we fully support the establishment of an intergovernmental panel on ocean governance that would report to the General Assembly through the Secretary-General.

I also wish to underline the recent initiative undertaken by the Commonwealth to develop a "blue charter", which will serve to assist the countries of the Commonwealth, most of them small developing States, in meeting the requirements outlined in SDG 14. Likewise, we wholeheartedly welcome the November 2016 entry into force of the Paris Agreement. It is only by greening our actions that we can ensure that sustainable development complements and respects Mother Earth. Malta, together with all of its partners in the European Union, is strongly committed to the Paris Agreement.

As a Government, we base our policies on four overarching principles: social mobility, social justice, equality and unity. Only today did we learn that, for another year in a row, fewer people in Malta are at risk of poverty. That follows our Government's efforts to distribute the proceeds that come from sustained growth fairly. That is an achievement that is as dear to us as our record-setting economic growth and minimal levels of unemployment. It is exactly what we strive for. Our raison d'être is what we describe as prosperity with a purpose.

A prosperous future must be accompanied by an inclusive society. People who live in fear or who are oppressed or discriminated against cannot realize their potential, and are therefore not at peace. Malta seeks to lead by example and ensure equality as a hallmark

of our political legacy. We have put human rights, equality and empowerment at the forefront of our political agenda, particularly on the priority issues of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer rights and gender equality. We have redefined marriage to grant full equality and affirm gender neutral access. All this has been complemented by amendments to our constitution to protect people against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. These individual choices should really have as little significance as the colour of one's eyes.

The economic and political empowerment of our citizens, regardless of their gender, is a priority for us. We have been gradually introducing measures to help reconcile work and family responsibilities. We are proud to be the only European country providing universal free child care to all working parents, an initiative that has liberated the potential of so many women in our society. We want to ensure more gender-balanced political representation, coupled with recent initiatives to increase youth participation by lowering the voting age in general and in European elections from 18 to 16 years of age, after having already lowered it for local elections.

Malta, despite its small size, can now serve as a beacon of political courage that inspires others to introduce concrete measures and reforms. Everyone must feel empowered in today's society. The protection of marginalized and vulnerable people is a must if we are to strive for an inclusive world. The United Nations is pivotal in all this. It must continue to spearhead, sustain and mobilize the international community as we journey along the ambitious path to 2030.

But so much more must be done. The exploitation of human misery knows no boundaries. Migrant smuggling and human trafficking by criminal groups are prevalent all over the world, and Malta has witnessed much of that very close to home, along the central Mediterranean routes. As a State member of the European Union, Malta is part of a wider European response aimed at tackling human-trafficking networks in the Mediterranean Sea.

However, without a global response, national and even regional action is insufficient. Malta welcomes the progress that has been made in developing a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. That should reaffirm the sovereign right of States to decide their immigration policies, but it should also commit them to building a migration system and institutions that operate in a timely manner so that migrants are treated fairly and with dignity. It should protect migrants' human rights and create awareness of the importance of combating exploitation and modern slavery. It should lead campaigns against xenophobia while providing support for the integration of long-term migrants and taking account of the feelings of people in host countries. It is also our belief that although the global compact should encompass all of these measures, it should also facilitate orderly, safe and regular migration, while committing States, particularly those of origin and transit, to taking action to reduce illegal and unmanaged flows.

Challenging times require us to act swiftly to meet such challenges. And that time is now. It is sooner rather than later. Systematic action by stakeholders at all levels and across all strata is crucial if its benefits are to be felt by people in every corner of the world. The United Nations is the prime mobilizer and anchor of international peace, security and stability and has a crucial role to play if we are to secure a peaceful, sustainable and better world for all. Malta is a firm believer in the overarching power of multilateralism. We do not believe that the United Nations is simply a sum of its parts. Rather, it is a force that grows exponentially when we think and act as one rather than alone.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. José Ulisses Correia e Silva, Prime Minister and Minister for Reform of the Republic of Cabo Verde

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for Reform of the Republic of Cabo Verde.

Mr. José Ulisses Correia e Silva, Prime Minister and Minister for Reform of the Republic of Cabo Verde, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. José Ulisses Correia e Silva, Prime Minister and Minister of Reform of the

Republic of Cabo Verde, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Silva (Cabo Verde) (*spoke in Portuguese, English text provided by the delegation*): I am very pleased and honoured to be taking part in this meeting of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I bring with me the warm greetings of the Cabo Verdean people both living in the country and in the diaspora.

I want to assure Secretary-General António Guterres of the full support of the Government of Cabo Verde, especially in carrying out the reforms he has announced aimed at strengthening the broad delivery capacity, transparency and accountability of our Organization.

I salute the President of the Assembly at its seventy-second session, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, and wish him every success. We listened with particular interest to the programme he has announced for his presidency, whose six points are interlinked and geared to ensuring people's protection, dignity and well-being. Indeed, the theme proposed for the seventy-second session could not be more appropriate, given the underlying objective of the President's programme to bring the United Nations ever closer to the people.

Cabo Verde prides itself on being a nation with five and a half centuries of history, and on having built a creole identity of its own at the junction between Africa and Europe, while also being open to the world, with a significant diaspora in several countries and embodying the peaceful coexistence we wish to see in all nations. As a small island country that has few natural resources and no mineral resources at all, we know that we can only affirm ourselves in the concert of nations and in the global economic system by exemplifying political, institutional and social stability; by displaying cosmopolitanism, being trustworthy in our relations with development partners and investors; by upholding the values of democracy, freedom, human dignity and full citizenship; and by proving the quality of our institutions and the excellence of our human resources. Although intangible, they are our greatest assets and the foundation of our development process. Our only option is to value those assets and to make them distinctive and focused on the people who are truly our development actors and beneficiaries — the children, young people, women and men of all countries.

I raise these points because I agree that it is appropriate to focus on people. Women and men in every country need political, institutional, socioeconomic and educational environments that release their creative energy and their capacity to innovate and learn, to work, cooperate and trust, to self-organize and to be accountable. That is possible only in environments of peace and security that establish a belief in the future in people, as opposed to simply living one day at a time, beset with unease and limited horizons.

The people and the Government of Cabo Verde are concerned about the current international context, where not only do old disputes persist but where we are also seeing new internal political crises, armed conflicts, terrorist acts and the organized crimes of trafficking in drugs, people and weapons and piracy, as well as other transnational ideological trends, such as populism, racial supremacy, xenophobia and intolerance of human and cultural diversity.

Such ills are detrimental to global peace, because they cause human suffering, claim lives and contribute to other humanitarian tragedies, such as the unprecedented increase we are seeing in the numbers of refugees, as well as in hunger and violence against women and children. They undermine the rule of law, weaken democracy, threaten the territorial integrity of States, corrupt the bases of economic and social progress and endanger coexistence at both the national and international levels. These evils, unfortunately, spare no region in a globalized world.

Just as the threats to security are global, so are the challenges. The opportunities for combat ing them effectively are also global, and permanent representation for Africa on the Security Council is therefore fully justified. The Government of Cabo Verde supports reform of the Security Council aimed at enabling it to reflect today's changing world by integrating permanent representation for Africa into its broader composition. In our view, considering that the positions of both sides have already been sufficiently expressed, it is time to start negotiations based on a text.

Thanks to the United Nations, for the first time humankind has a holistic and comprehensive agenda that offers a real opportunity for sustainable and inclusive development, not only because it integrates the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, but also because it considers the cross-cutting issues of peace, security, justice and necessary partnerships and promotes the call to leave no one behind.

Now, two years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the challenges lie in its implementation. The United Nations must therefore be able to play a catalytic role in forming consensus and mobilizing resources to make a difference on the implementation, funding and capacity-building fronts. In that regard, we commend the Secretary-General's ongoing exercise aimed at adapting the United Nations development system and reforming the Secretariat's management structures to meet the challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

In that regard, we should focus particularly on the situation of middle-income countries, including small island developing States that have graduated to that status, such as Cabo Verde. This category of countries needs a common response in terms of new metrics that can provide a more systemic assessment of their financial needs and structural vulnerabilities.

For small island developing States, the swift and rapid implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate change is a priority, as it should be for the whole world.

Cabo Verde expresses its solidarity with the victims of recent hurricanes. While there have always been hurricanes, the bad news is that with climate change they tend to be more frequent, cruel and destructive. The consequences are devastating for the regions and countries that are most vulnerable from an environmental and economic point of view, such as small island developing States and their regions. Every new day is one day too late for vigorous and globalized action on the factors that trigger and accelerate climate change.

For Cabo Verde, the rule of law and democracy are not mere options; above all, they are essential to ensuring objective, transparent and predictable governance, both nationally and internationally. Cabo Verde's internal order is aligned with international positions and practices in the field of human rights through the Constitution of the Republic and its laws, institutions, public policies and social practices. We recognize, however, that there have been difficulties within the United Nations in harmonizing positions regarding the universalization of human rights principles and practices, and that we must pursue that objective through dialogue and respect among parties.

In that regard, I would like to highlight the Secretary-General's initiative to establish a pact with Member States and a circle of leadership on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse in all United Nations operations, above all in the context of peacekeeping and humanitarian action. That initiative will give greater dignity to our world's most vulnerable people, especially women and girls, and promote their rights.

As a supporter of international relations governed by international law, Cabo Verde actively participates in codifying such law by joining and taking part in negotiations and by signing, ratifying and implementing most of the international instruments in a broad spectrum of areas. In that context, Cabo Verde has already deposited its instrument of ratification of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, concluded in New York on 7 July.

We welcome the success of the preparatory work towards developing an international legal instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Moreover, we support the convening of a diplomatic conference in 2018 to work towards such a convention issue, which should have safeguards for the specific situation of small island developing States.

The conclusion of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was a historic moment in the fight against impunity for those responsible for the most serious crimes against humanity, and I therefore express Cabo Verde's firm support to the ICC. Strengthening the Court is a duty that the present generation owes to future ones.

As written by a poet and songwriter, and later sung by the diva Cesária Évora, Cabo Verde is "ten little grains of sand" in the middle of the Atlantic. Despite our small size, we want to make Cabo Verde a country with relevance in the Middle Atlantic in terms of economic stature, security and diplomacy for peace and the promotion of freedom and democracy. We intend to position Cabo Verde as a transit hub in the Middle Atlantic for tourism, air transport, port operations, financial and investment operations, business localization and development in the digital and nano-technological economy, and in the attraction of investment and skills from the diaspora.

Cabo Verde promotes collective and cooperative security systems, as necessitated by the transnational nature of crime and its location. We are seeking to

position ourselves as a useful interlocutor in the concert of nations for dialogue, peace and tolerance. Its history and location have transformed Cabo Verde into a country born of mergers between Europe and Africa, a country that maintains good relations with all nations of the world. We would like to value and develop those assets strategically. That is our vision and purpose for our economy, security and diplomacy. It is embodied in our strategic plan for sustainable development, which has already been completed and is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. Partnerships are an integral and indispensable part of the 2030 Agenda, and national ownership will find in them an unquestionable complement so that our strategic plan for sustainable development can succeed, with the United Nations at the forefront.

Happiness is the ultimate right to which the people of the world aspire. The 2030 Agenda has given the world not only a vision but also a road map for bringing happiness to people and leaving no one behind on the path to sustainable development. In 1945, the peoples of the United Nations showed their determination to conduct humankind down a path that would not lead to war. Today, with the 2030 Agenda, they will be able to determine another course for humankind and for people who struggle with poverty and a lack of development alternatives.

It is up to us — we, the peoples of the United Nations — to support both the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session in this honourable and great task of advancing the happiness agenda.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for Reform of the Republic of Cabo Verde for the statement he has just made.

Mr. José Ulisses Correia e Silva, Prime Minister and Minister for Reform of the Republic of Cabo Verde, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister of Viet Nam.

Mr. Pham Binh Minh (Viet Nam): I extend my warmest congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session.

My special thanks also go to the Secretary-General and the Secretariat. Only 10 months into his term of office, Mr. Guterres has already left his mark on the Organization's work for peace, development and human rights.

On 20 September 1977, exactly 40 years ago, Viet Nam was admitted to the United Nations as its 149th Member. One day later, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Viet Nam stood right here at this rostrum and addressed the General Assembly (see A/32/PV.1). Representing a nation devastated by decades of war, he affirmed a unified Viet Nam's pledge to cooperate closely with other Member States in striving tirelessly to turn the lofty goals of the United Nations into reality. Those goals are peace, national independence, democracy and social progress.

Those 40 years have been an era of transformation for my country. Today, Viet Nam is a dynamic economy on a path to reform and sustainable development. We have transformed ourselves from being aid-dependent to a lower middle-income country. Our efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals have helped to bring millions of Vietnamese out of poverty.

But one thing has not changed. Viet Nam today is as committed as ever to the United Nations. We are a staunch supporter and proponent of multilateralism with the United Nations at its core. We believe in the fundamental role of international law and the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of respect for sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity, non-interference, of refraining from the threat or use of force and of working for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

We are gathered here as the world is undergoing profound and fast transformations. The fourth industrial revolution, particularly the advance of digital technology, is creating unprecedented opportunities for development for all. Enormous efforts to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are under way, and yet our world is still fraught with turmoil, uncertainties and fragility. While peace and cooperation prevail, people around the world are facing unprecedented challenges to their security and development. Political instability and the risk of conflicts, disasters and climate change threaten the sustainable development of all nations.

Terrorism and weapons of mass destruction have gone global and are a threat to everyone.

Efforts to achieve disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation have not progressed as expected. The worst migration and humanitarian crisis since the Second World War continues to unfold. For many decades, the desire to be able to live in peace has remained a distant dream for millions of people. Together, with the slow and unsustainable growth of the global economy, globalization and economic integration are now facing a less certain future. Inequality within and between countries remains one of the biggest challenges of our time. The impact of climate change is ever more real and far beyond what has been predicted. This year, we have witnessed multiple natural disasters that have inflicted heavy losses in human life and property in Cuba, Mexico, the United States and other Caribbean countries.

Given those daunting challenges, the theme chosen for this session, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet" could not have been more timely. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the international community has clearly chosen sustainable development as the path towards a better destiny for current and future generations. It is now incumbent on us to make that ambitious plan a reality. Developing countries should be allowed more favourable conditions and resources to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. We call on developed nations to fulfil their commitments on providing financial assistance and technology transfer for developing countries.

On the path to sustainable development, we must place the interests of the people at the centre of all our policies and actions. If we do not, we will not be able to ensure a decent life for all. I do not believe that life can be decent when poverty, unemployment and epidemics are still not effectively addressed. It cannot be decent if it is still threatened by climate change and disasters. Above all, we will not succeed in our quest for sustainable development and a decent life for all if we cannot secure sustainable peace.

Having enjoyed peace and independence for the past four decades, we now know what peace can bring about. Sustaining peace must always be at the top of our agenda. That major undertaking will take strong commitment and cooperation. I believe we will need to come together to strengthen multilateralism to achieve those goals.

For today's global challenges, multilateralism has been shown to provide the most effective solutions. Multilateral institutions are venues in which countries can align their various interests, manage disputes and differences, and promote cooperation. However, trust in multilateralism will falter if those institutions fail to prove their effectiveness or lack consensus on common goals and principles. Global and regional multilateral mechanisms should therefore function in a transparent, effective and responsive manner.

The United Nations must be at the centre of coordination and joint efforts to address global challenges, building an ever more comprehensive system of rules and norms with a mechanism for ensuring objectiveness, fairness and equality. To do that, the United Nations must undertake comprehensive reforms, from its organizational structure and working methodologies to the way that development resources are mobilized and allocated. Viet Nam supports efforts to reform the United Nations in that regard and will participate responsibly in the process.

International law is an essential foundation of order and stability in international relations. Wars, conflicts and tension occur today mainly because international law is not fully respected or observed in good faith. We believe that by upholding international law, peace can be secured. We should take concrete action, in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, to prevent conflicts, build confidence and peacefully settle disputes, including in the Middle East and Africa, and we call for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. In that regard, we also find that the unilateral embargo on Cuba is inappropriate and call for its immediate removal.

We welcome the recent adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, a historic milestone on the road to a world free of nuclear weapons. I am signing the Treaty today, and call on others to sign and ratify it so as to enable its entry into force as soon as possible. Let us all be clear — the danger of nuclear weapons will loom over humankind as long as they continue to exist.

This year also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Viet Nam is proud to be a member. ASEAN is striving to build a rules-based and people-oriented community to strengthen its centrality in the evolving regional architecture and actively contribute to peace,

stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. Viet Nam is working closely with other ASEAN members to address common challenges.

With regard to the South China Sea dispute, Viet Nam and ASEAN call on all the parties concerned to exercise self-restraint and settle disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. They must fully respect diplomatic and legal processes, implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and expedite the completion of an effective and legally binding code of conduct.

Viet Nam also took pride in hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum this year, as we seek to build an Asia-Pacific partnership for sustainable and inclusive development in the twenty-first century.

At the global level, Viet Nam has actively engaged in the work of the United Nations, serving on the Human Rights Council from 2014 to 2016 and as a member of the Economic and Social Council for the term 2016-2018. We have begun to implement our national plan of action for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We will present our voluntary national review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2018. In March, Viet Nam hosted a high-level Euro-Asia regional meeting on improving cooperation on transit and trade facilitation.

Since 2014, Viet Nam has sent its officers to work in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa and is preparing for the deployment of level-two field hospitals. Before that, in 2009, Viet Nam presented its candidature for non-permanent membership of the Security Council for the term 2020-2021. We believe that those are the most practical ways we can contribute to the cause of sustainable peace and security.

I am confident that through our concerted effort and the strength of multilateralism, we will fulfil our mission to maintain peace and security and secure a decent life and a sustainable future for all.

The meeting rose at noon.